

## POSITION PAPER

It is the position of University sports organisations that current sports (facilities and activities) fees be exempted from the Federal Government's proposed VSU legislation and that Universities be responsible for the governance and application of those funds.

Should this exemption not be granted, the legislation will result in an annual loss of more than \$30 million in funding for University sport services, programs and facilities. This figure presently underpins the vital contribution made by Universities to sporting infrastructure (especially in regional Australia), the health and fitness of the nation, and high performance sport, particularly the Olympic/Paralympic disciplines.

By way of emphasis, Australian Universities maintain \$600 million worth of sporting infrastructure, enjoyed by nearly half a million people. All of this is achieved with negligible access to the estimated \$2 billion of taxes and rates spent on sport by the three tiers of Government each year.

University sports organisations can no more see the sense in undermining a functioning, integral part of our sport and activities fabric than they can see the logic in winding back spending on sport at the tertiary level while England – our great rivals at next year's Commonwealth Games – has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the same sector in recent years. The question needs to be asked: How will this legislation impact on our performances in Melbourne and Beijing in 2008?

Curiously, this legislation has been introduced just six months after the Federal Government, through its agency the Australian Sports Commission, sought universities' cooperation in establishing the Athlete Friendly University Network. The network is designed to support our top athletes in balancing study and sport so they are not forced to make a choice between the two. It is fair to say that if this legislation is passed the network may collapse before it has time to showcase its obvious benefits.

The question also needs to be asked about this legislation's impact on community health and fitness at a time when obesity has been identified as one of the nation's greatest issues. How does the Federal Government reconcile taking \$30m out of sport, health and fitness at the tertiary level just as they are spending \$90m to encourage school children to take up organised sport?

There is one other consideration. Sport has been an important element in the development of many of our community leaders, as reinforced by the number of prominent business people, elite sports administrators and Rhodes Scholars who have put their name to our advertisement.

None of these people underestimate the part University sport has played in their lives. No one disputes their value to Australian society. Why, we ask, put that at risk?

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